

Department Public Integrity Section launched a 30-day initial inquiry under the authority of the Independent Counsel Act. Third, Sen. Thompson decided that his Committee would hold open hearings on Hudson.

3. Secretary Babbitt's Telephone Conversation with Sen. McCain Regarding Babbitt's Aug. 30, 1996, Letter

White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles said he read the Oct. 12, 1997, article in The Washington Post and found it troubling, as it alleged that Babbitt lied to a United States Senator. Bowles believed he had a duty to look into the matter. He therefore called Babbitt the next day, Monday, Oct. 13 (which was Columbus Day), and asked Babbitt if he had time to come to the White House to meet with him. Bowles did not provide Babbitt with the reason he wanted to meet, and Babbitt did not ask for one; Babbitt understood that Bowles wanted to discuss Babbitt's letters to Sens. McCain and Thompson.

When Babbitt arrived at the White House a short time later, he met with Bowles and Counsel to the President Charles F.C. Ruff in Bowles's office. Bowles opened the brief meeting by telling Babbitt that he had seen The Washington Post article on Babbitt's letters to McCain and Thompson. Bowles was not familiar with Babbitt's letters and did not accept the article at face value, but he told Babbitt that the allegation – lying to a United States Senator – was a serious matter and was unacceptable.⁶³² Babbitt told Bowles that he did not lie to Sen. McCain. Bowles told Babbitt that if that was the case, Babbitt should straighten the issue out with McCain, which Babbitt agreed to do.

⁶³²A White House document dated Oct. 28, 1997, and entitled, "Talking Points," which apparently was prepared for the President to use in response to anticipated questions from the press, confirmed that Bowles communicated to Babbitt at their meeting "the necessity of being candid in his communications with Congress."